

THE DIVERSITY CULTURE

Creating Conversations of Faith with Buddhist
Barristas, Agnostic Students, Aging Hippies,
Political Activists, and Everyone In Between

MATTHEW RALEY

 Kregel
Publications

*The Diversity Culture: Creating Conversations of Faith with
Buddhist Barristas, Agnostic Students, Aging Hippies, Political
Activists, and Everyone in Between*

© 2009 by Matthew Raley

Published by Kregel Publications, a division of Kregel, Inc., P.O.
Box 2607, Grand Rapids, MI 49501.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by
any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or
otherwise—without written permission of the publisher, except
for brief quotations in printed reviews.

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD
BIBLE, updated edition. Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963,
1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman
Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

ISBN 978-0-8254-3579-9

Printed in the United States of America

09 10 11 12 13 / 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

Introduction: The Chair in Café Siddhartha ■ 9

Part 1 Gathering at the Well

Understand the Tension

1. Stories from New York, Frisco, and Sychar ■ 23
2. Personal Identity on Saturday ■ 32
3. Street Postmodernism ■ 44
4. Truth Out of the Crucible ■ 56

Part 2 Strategizing at the Well

Formulate the Message

5. The Power of Scripture ■ 71
6. The Power of Community ■ 85
7. The Power of Testimony ■ 97

Part 3 Winning at the Well

Apply the Model

8. Be a Heretic ■ 109
9. Find Your Mode ■ 121
10. Answer the Question ■ 131

11. Confront a Friend ■ 142

12. Imagine the Scene ■ 154

Conclusion: Belonging at Café Siddhartha ■ 159

Notes ■ 167

Introduction

THE CHAIR IN CAFÉ SIDDHARTHA

A woman rolled over and reached, but remembered that her new friend had already left. She sat up, staring at the impression he had made on her bed. At least he had his own life.

Past cold candles she shuffled to her bathroom, the air inside still fragrant, condensation still clinging to the window after his shower. He would be wearing that Huntsman suit made for him last time he was in London—the suit he wore when she first saw him two weeks ago at Davies Symphony Hall. And maybe the same tie from Arnys. When you're on a team preparing to argue before the Ninth Circuit you don't wear your beloved tie-dye and jeans—even on Columbus Day.

The woman was annoyed that her new client had insisted on meeting. Even though the holiday is totally imperialist, she wished that she didn't have to get into business mode, and she was bored by the prospect of yet another menu-design. Still, the meeting wasn't until early afternoon, so she lingered over her makeup.

The TV remote called from the kitchen counter to her pre-election obsessions. She switched on MSNBC and caught the headlines. Weekend poll shows Obama up seven.¹ *Cool*. Europeans try to keep their banks from collapsing. *Not cool*.

She poured coffee out of the French press and held the mug under her nose while she scanned the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Predictions that the financial collapse will stall climate change initiatives, anxious summary

of the economic developments over the weekend, analysis of McCain and Obama avoiding the immigration issue.²

After the computer finished clicking and sighing, she checked how much e-mail had piled up over the weekend. Amid the flurry of personal messages were two articles from the *New York Times*. One friend had bragging rights, a mention of the bookstore where he worked, City Lights, in a travel article on Buddhist attractions in San Francisco.³ Another friend was gloating over Sarah Palin's splitting right-wingers, forwarding a column by David Brooks that dissed the Alaskan governor.⁴ The friend wrote, "McSame's going down! You betcha!"

Time kept on slipping, slipping, slipping.

The woman opened a cupboard. *Froot Loops!* It was very cute. Her new friend had gone out this morning and brought back Froot Loops and put Toucan Sam just inside the cupboard smiling down his beak at her. She loved a guy who could keep an inside joke going. All weekend bumming around Half Moon Bay it had been, "Follow my nose! It always knows!"

But if he went any further with it, she'd get annoyed.

Attired in the black trousers and narrow-shouldered jacket she found in Milan, her funky boots that clopped on her wide floorboards, and a low-cut, fitted T-shirt, she strode out of her loft into the fog, down to her Outback.

At this hour, the drive along I-80 and across the Bay Bridge into the City would not be enraging but still long. That was why they had KQED. "Talk of the Nation" was all about lynching—"How Far Have We Come?" Ted Koppel was talking about his new documentary on the subject, and a congressman described his experiences as an eighteen-year-old Freedom Rider in Mississippi.⁵ *Mississippi, where they still believe the Bible's commands to hate and kill people.* The woman glanced at a billboard against the proposition banning gay marriage. *We haven't come all that far, have we. Still fighting hate.*

She parked, slung her large leather portfolio over her shoulder, and walked to Café Siddhartha around the corner from her studio—as if she needed more caffeine. What she wanted was the aura of the place, the

energy. It was like stepping into one of the temples where she'd meditated in Tibet. The walls were floor-to-ceiling saffron. Deep chimes spoke, and the Buddha laughed. The café had an authenticity she needed—in spite of the hissing espresso machine.

The woman took her mocha and turned to the seating area thronged with people. There was only one chair at a common table—right next to . . . whoever this was.

Well, she knew exactly who he was: he was her mental picture of a Mississippi bigot. He was fat, his face all soft and oily. He wore this dark blue cardboard suit with the jacket buttoned over his paunch. And where could he have gotten it? And when? It could only have been Penny's, circa 1995, what with the wide lapels and sloping shoulders. This he had mated with a white shirt and skinny red tie—1984, Nancy Reagan red. And the pre-folded, matching pocket square.

His hair was Grecian Formula black, parted on the right by a razor blade and swirled above his forehead, apparently under thermonuclear heat.

He was reading a book by—no, surely not. It couldn't have been Nixon's Chuck Colson. But it was: his picture was on the back.

How was she to bask in the Tibetan aura sitting next to a Baptist? He reminded her of the imported Southerner her parents' church hired in 1979 when she was in high school—Mississippi in the San Joaquin valley. Had he gotten lost passing out tracts at Pier 39? Really lost?

The Barriers

Many evangelicals fear this woman.

They don't know what to do with her hostility: confront, mock, soothe? There's no soothing an attitude so visceral. Confronting it is asking for hostility times ten. That leaves mockery—the talk radio mode most evangelicals have learned by now—which fire-bombs whatever bridge there might've been.

But the fear goes deeper. Many evangelicals sense the woman's hostility is the least of their problems.

Evangelicals in America have a distinct subculture. They tend to worship in churches with conservative political and theological views. The strongest bases of evangelicalism are in suburbia, and the movement is disproportionately white and middle class. Evangelicals have their own media, reading different books and magazines than secular people, visiting different Web sites, listening to Christian music and radio, and often watching Christian TV stations and movies.⁶

The woman, many evangelicals feel, has built a life in which they have no place. She didn't just stop going to church after escaping her parents; she moved to the big city and changed identities. Her adopted ways were a point-by-point rebuke to her inheritance—not small-town or suburban, but urban; not Western but Eastern; not Christian but New Age; not monogamous but liberated.

I believe the woman now lives in her own distinct culture, one that is full of paradox.

While her culture is often urban, it thrives just as powerfully in Boulder as in San Francisco. The culture is often highly educated and artistic, embracing the preacher's daughter who came out as a lesbian, went to Reed College in Portland, and became a visual artist. But it also belongs to the straight, blue-collar guy who, despite never finishing college, does well painting houses in Fresno, the guy whose history is unclear—the salt of the earth, but with a ponytail. While this culture is hostile to America's vast consumer society, rejecting mass-production aesthetics and corporate values, its adherents have well-tended investment portfolios and are influential in the business world, nurturing such successes as Ben & Jerry's and Starbucks. Yet Starbucks both appeals to and repels them (which is why our woman supports the independent café rather than hanging out at the chain). Politically the culture is blue: antiwar, environmentalist, pro-gay marriage, secular. But it consistently seeks to preserve local traditions.

This culture cries for a label. It needs to be distinguished from the consumer society, but a tag remains elusive. David Brooks calls it *Bobo*,

“bourgeois bohemian.” Bill O’Reilly calls it “secular progressive.” Rush Limbaugh calls it “liberal wacko.”

I call it the diversity culture, after its top priority. Café Siddhartha is about a convergence of influences, insights into life that come from exploration, openness, and freedom. The worst evil to the diversity culture is bigotry. Every shelter for narrow thinking must be eroded by fresh winds.

Most evangelicals have difficulty penetrating this culture’s ways, and seem to feel it was designed to exclude them. They feel the sting every time the woman talks about bigotry, not knowing whether to embrace the label or fight it. Multicultural talk is not merely irritating to them, but is insulting: “Diversity means every culture but ours.” So the rise of the diversity culture, especially when it wins elections as it did in 2008 with the triumph of Barack Obama, fills them with fear—the fear of having to interact with someone who looks down on them.

Evangelicals as a group feel they don’t belong in Café Siddhartha.

The barriers between the diversity culture and evangelicals are real. The hostility is not a misunderstanding, and the roots of it are often deep in the soil of family. The issues that have fed the hostility are consequential: disagreements about spirituality, cultural principles, history, politics, and the nature of free society. Mere dialogue will not make the hostility wither.

But evangelical fear can be dispelled—and must be.

Fear sabotages interactions with the woman of Café Siddhartha through pride, contempt, suspicion, and cynicism. Evangelicals’ inferior status in the diversity culture’s pecking order is often just as significant as the eclipse of their principles in provoking these emotions. They often react to Subaru

The Diversity Culture: The dominant American ethos of openness toward all beliefs and spiritual traditions.

Siddhartha: The Sanskrit birth name of the Buddha, translated, “One who has found meaning.”

Outbacks and the *New York Times*. Fear and its comrades can make evangelicals petty.

In addition, the fear often drives evangelicals to a blanket rejection of every aspect of the diversity culture without asking enough questions. For example, the diversity culture is overwhelmingly on the political left, while evangelicals are mostly on the right. But progressive political views are not necessarily anti-Christian. Is evangelism about winning souls, or votes? Further, the diversity culture often looks down on middle class life, provoking defensiveness in evangelical suburbia. But middle class life is not inherently godly. Should evangelicals be willing to question their social assumptions? More deeply, evangelicals can easily brand an openness to new perspectives as “relativism.” But is it relativistic to hear someone out, or to participate in discussions that may not resolve neatly?

The evangelical sense of calling in America needs to be refocused, which cannot be done wisely by reacting against the diversity culture in fear. The evangelical mission should be defined by God’s call in Scripture.

Fear of the diversity culture is not just a barrier to interacting with those outside evangelicalism, but even with some inside. The fear can be a generational marker: young believers, coming of age under the dominance of diversity, often do not identify with older believers’ suspicions. Truth be told, many young believers view the Baptist at Café Siddhartha from the same cultural point of view as the woman—fairly or unfairly. But they also sense that their heritage is a vital part of their calling to influence their secularized peers, and they desire wisdom from their elders about how to display Jesus Christ to a culture that will not acknowledge the category of Truth. Can older Christians impart that wisdom if they are fearful of interacting with Café Siddhartha?

There is an even more fundamental problem with evangelical fear. Amid similar conflicts, there was no such fear in Jesus.

The Model

A woman left her new friend’s house with a water pot. She strolled south through her town of Sychar, built at the foot of the mountains and enclosed by

a wall. In the open countryside, the woman passed the tomb of her forefather, Joseph, whose bones were buried here when Joshua led God's people into the land. Shielding her eyes against the high sun, she gazed at the peak of Mt. Gerizim where she knew the same Joshua had built a sanctuary to Yahweh.⁷

The location was commanded by Moses, and her fathers had built a second temple there,⁸ the very law carved on the stones of the altar.⁹

There was no sanctuary now. Almost two centuries before, John Hyrcanus the Jew had leveled it, just as he had destroyed the capital Samaria and opened the countryside to be trampled by Galilean Jews on their way to the apostate temple in Jerusalem.¹⁰ She dropped her arm and looked back at the road. Maybe she was divorced. Maybe she had precious little share in the hope of her fathers. But at least she wasn't a Jew.

Down the road she heard voices, Galilean voices. Loud men kicked up dust on their way north.¹¹ She was amid fields now, with no orchard in which to find shelter while they passed. And it was too late anyway. One of them had seen her, and the gang went silent. They spread across the width of the road as they walked; she would either have to push through them or step into the field. She chose the field, which at least gave her an excuse to look at her feet.¹²

In the shelter of Gerizim, amid trees, she approached the well of Jacob, the patriarch's legacy to Sychar. And who was this?

Another Jew—another Galilean, no doubt. Sitting at her father's well as if he owned it, as if Hyrcanus had given him the right to drink from it. Sitting there with his fringes, a rabbi, a professor of hate. Sitting there as if his presence would keep her from drawing water at her own well, as if she'd turn around and trudge back to Sychar with an empty jar. Well, he would be the one to leave.

The woman moved in close to the rabbi, looking at the well, tying the rope to her jar, lowering it and pulling it up—as if he wasn't there.

She felt his eyes on her. She heard the linen of his robe whisper as his hand reached into her peripheral vision. "Give me a drink."

A Galilean, all right. The accent gave him away. What fresh insult was this?

The Challenge

We have an easy response to Jesus' interactions at the well (John 4:1–26). He was God. He knew the Samaritan woman supernaturally, so he could take social risks with assurance. We're not divine. The best we can do is learn his compassion for the lost and be ready for any opportunities.

The easy response won't work.

The apostle John showed more of Jesus' interactions than any other witness. John gave us Jesus talking with Nicodemus in the dark (3:1–15), Jesus being confronted by his grieving friends Martha and Mary (11:17–44), Jesus in dialogue with his anxious disciples before his arrest (John 13–16), and Jesus being interrogated by Pilate (18:28–19:22).

John did not show these scenes to impress us with Jesus' divinity, but to refine our emulation of his humanity. Jesus the Galilean Jew initiated a relationship with the Samaritan woman. The offer of living water came from the Word made flesh. This conversation displays human hostility being conquered by human love.

So the tension at the well of Samaria can teach us to overcome fear at our own wells, the intersections where we meet the diversity culture.

The Premise

This book is about healing broken relationships as a way of showing Jesus Christ to contemporary America. My desire is that you find sound scholarship and thinking here. But, because of the book's relational focus, I realize that my observations are often subjective—a characteristic I do not regret, because the issues in this book are full of personal significance for me.

As a pastor, I feel the hostility between evangelicals and the diversity culture. Like every pastor traversing society's intersections, I constantly analyze how to minister to people across the boundaries of politics and status. I have to. If I do not find ways to cross the boundaries, I worry that in twenty years my church won't exist.

But I also feel the hostility more intuitively. As I will describe in the conclusion, I inherited from my parents a combination of strong views and

openness to interaction. In a sense, my parents' habits and example have placed me at the well from the beginning of my life. I love the people of Café Siddhartha and the people of evangelical churches because I grew up around both. So the heat of their charges and countercharges is grievous to me. There are days when I don't care which side is right.

The spiritual conclusions of this book come from my own struggle to show Christ as I know him—strong and gracious—in the context of this hostility.

At eighteen, I went off to a secular university, taking my strong conservative views of politics and theology—views which I retain. Despite my relatively open upbringing, I had a sense of going to battle, of the need for unflinching confrontation with those who held other views. I was determined to live out my heritage in the midst of opposition.

But my stories about academic liberals, about the New Age movement, about the persecution of Christians on campuses weren't solid enough. I quickly found that I wasn't dealing with types, but with individuals. One day, after a session of the freshman course on worldviews, I was sent to the university chaplain for counseling. I had been "courageous for the truth" in class and thought sure I was in for some brainwashing. Instead the chaplain and I traded favorite scenes from Monty Python. When I took a course on the New Testament from a liberal religious studies professor, I expected nothing but ideology. But in class he gave a clearer and more disciplined exposition of the gospel from John 3 than I had ever heard from any evangelical preacher, and he responded to my criticisms of modernist interpretations with respect.

I needed to interpret people justly.

I had, for instance, a self-indulgent reactivity to people's identity signals. The tie-dye, the clogs, the NARAL buttons, the academic lingo—all of it fed my sarcasm, the memory of which now embarrasses me. I also had a self-indulgent tendency to fill in what people believed on the basis of one or two statements, only to find that their views were more subtle than I had imagined. My self-indulgence even allowed me a superior attitude toward people's experiences. A friend once shared his view that rape was an expression of male dominance, which I dismissed as feminist cant. When, in a cold

fury, he told me how men back in his rural hometown bragged about their exploits, I shut up. He had been exposed to talk more vile than I'd ever heard.

For God to use me in the diversity culture, I had to confront my self-indulgence, and learn how to be godly in the midst of opposition.

So this book is the fruit of my study and struggle, and might be understood best as a kind of testimony, even confession, rather than an argument. For the past several years I have tried to learn how Jesus is converting the diversity culture, and like others wrestling with these issues, I have not found many models. There were moments in this intellectual and relational struggle when I've never felt more alone.

I am qualified only to document what I've observed at the intersections between evangelicals and the diversity culture, and to draw applications that I have found to be powerful from the model of Jesus Christ.

My method is twofold: First, I try to let the diversity culture speak for itself, even to choose the topics of discussion. I do this using selections from the "Most E-mailed" list of articles on the *New York Times* Web site in 2006–2008. The list, especially from that news organization, is one way to answer the question, "What issues does the diversity culture think about?" Second, I intend to construct a detailed analogy between the Samaritan-Jewish hostility and the Siddhartha-evangelical hostility. I believe that if we consider Jesus' interactions with the Samaritan woman carefully, we can understand how he is interacting today.

In part 1, I give a tour of four barriers that I've noticed between the diversity culture and evangelicals. But an exegesis of culture is not enough for evangelicals to cross those barriers. So, in part 2, I outline a theology for healing relationships today, what I believe is the Gospel of John's winning message. In part 3, I offer four practical guides from Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman.

I believe we have the opportunity to heal relationships with people of the diversity culture, and I base that belief on a simple premise:

We have made a mistake by interpreting both the woman and the Baptist according to their group identities. *Today, the individual is more credible than the group.*

BECOMING A HEALER

- Observe your own reactions to people from the diversity culture. Be specific about the signals that provoke you.
- Consider whether your reactions are sparked by fear. Do you avoid diversity people or engage them? Do you feel superior? If so, how would you interact with them if you set your superiority aside?
- What are you curious to know about the specific diversity people you meet? How might you satisfy your curiosity?

Notes

1. USAToday/Gallup, <http://www.usatoday.com/news/politics/election2008/poll-tracker.htm>.
2. *San Francisco Chronicle*, Monday, October 13, 2008, <http://www.sfgate.com>.
3. Perry Garfinkle, "In Buddha's Path on the Streets of San Francisco," *The New York Times*, October 10, 2008.
4. David Brooks, "The Class War Before Palin," *The New York Times*, October 10, 2008.
5. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=95672737>.
6. The definition of the term *evangelical* is much debated. To construct a theological definition is an important task, but beyond the scope of this book. I am using the term to refer to members of the subculture I describe. The focus of this book is on the relationship between the culture of evangelicals with American consumer society and with the culture represented by Café Siddhartha.
7. "The Samaritans believed that Joshua built a sanctuary on Mt. Gerizim, which was the center for all early Israelite worship." *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975).
8. "There is no exact date for this event. Josephus (Jos. Antiq. XI. viii. 1–4) tells of the building of this temple, but the account is so confused that different scholars, on the basis of the evidence, date the building of this temple anywhere from the time of Nehemiah to the time of Alexander the Great." Ibid.
9. The Samaritan Pentateuch substituted "Mt. Gerizim for Mt. Ebal as the place where the law was to be written on the stones of the altar (Deut 27:4)." Ibid.
10. "Samaria was finally captured and destroyed by Hyrcanus (as evidenced in archaeological excavations) and its citizens exiled. . . . Thus, the way to Galilee was opened to the Jews." Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 131.
11. Jesus traveled north from Judea with his disciples. He would have reached Jacob's well, which is south of Sychar, before reaching the city. His disciples left him at the well and continued north while the Samaritan woman journeyed south on the same road. She likely passed them at some point.
12. This incident is fictional, yet I offer it as the kind of insult the disciples might have made. Their attitudes toward Samaritans remained bigoted long after seeing Jesus in conversation with the woman (e.g., Luke 9:51–56).